



Getting Started: Tips for Beginning Your Family History Research

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Family History v. Genealogy

- Definitions
- Differences
- Importance?



Approaching Your Subject

- Hobby or “serious” occupation
- Establishing realistic goals
 - Family Reunion
 - Love history
 - Publish a book
- Solitary or group function
- Role of societies
- Internet’s impact



Things to Remember When Getting Started

- 1. Document your sources
- 2. Understand the difference between primary and secondary sources
- 3. “The computer” is your friend
- 4. You can never be too organized
- 5. More fun when research is done with others (Involve the whole family)

Steps to Begin Your Research

- Remember: Family history is not difficult to start and does not need to cost a lot of money to do
- Start with yourself and work back (from what you know to what you don't know)
- Supplies:
 - Paper
 - Folders (with dividers)
 - Something to write with (pencils)
 - Computer (not necessary, but it helps)



■ Step 1: Get Organized

- Pedigree charts
- Family Group Sheet
- Folders for each family
- Create “check lists” and “to do” lists
- Create a research log or calendar



Step 2: Read, Read, Read

- Find a good “how to...” book
- Take the time
- Local library or bookstore should carry several titles to choose from



Randy's Recommended List

- Crandall's *Shaking Your Family Tree* (1986)
- Greenwood's *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy* (2000)
- Burroughs' *Black Roots* (2001)
- Williams' *Know Your Ancestors* (1960)



Step 3: Do Your Homework

- Talk to relatives (grandparents, cousins, uncles, etc.)
- Ask for full names and nicknames
- Dates of important events
- Check: journals/diaries, letters, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, family bibles, baby books, photo albums, family traditions, etc.
- See how much of a pedigree chart you can complete by talking with relatives



■ Step 4: Oral Histories

- Interview relatives and important citizens from the area your family lived
- Tape record/create transcripts
- Ask for permission before your visit
- Try to obtain personal memories and stories about “your people.”



Step 5: Plan A Research Strategy

- Detailed and organized
- Use a pedigree chart to focus your search
- Can't research every ancestor at once
- Plan a library visit
- Email etiquette/SASE if using snail mail
- Recognize individuals that assist you with your research (thank you note)



Step 6: Census Records

- Learn about census records (what they can and can not do for you)
- Printed and on computer
- Provide 10 year snapshots
- Look for state census records



■ Step 7: Vital Records

- Birth, Death and Marriage Records
- Vital Records Division of the Michigan Dept. of Community Health
- Local County Courthouse
- Microfilm copies?



Step 8: Additional Sources

- Newspapers for obituaries, birth announcements, marriages, etc.
- City Directories
- Published family histories
- County histories



Step 9: Ask For Help

- Librarians are on the desks to assist you
- Feel free to ask for assistance
- Library staff can help teach you how a collection is organized
- Take time to search the various online catalogs



Join A Genealogical Society

- Local area and one from an area your family has lived
- Great resource for collecting and sharing information
- Like minded people that are eager to talk about genealogy and offer assistance
- Be active in the genealogical community (more than just your family)



Library Tips

- Come prepared
- Remember not everyone is as interested in your family as you are
- Libraries are there to serve everyone
- Libraries are thinking long term, not just about today
- Not every librarian loves genealogy, create a strategy for using those collections



Good Starting Points...

- Search the online catalog
 - ANSWER
 - www.answercat.org
- Search the Federal Census
- See if someone has already published a family history
- Search county histories



Review

- Set obtainable goals
- GET ORGANIZED
- Document your sources
- Don't isolate yourself



Questions?

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